

House Bill # 0572
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Position: Support

As the Pastor of The Church Without Walls, Global Reach we stand collectively in support of HB 0572 Maryland's Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Single-Occupancy Public Restrooms - Availability (The Accessible to All Act). This bill equitizes bathroom access for all Maryland residents state wide and shows the love for all humanity that Christ intended. Utilizing the bathroom is one of our most basic human needs and every person should be able to take care of their human needs with their dignity intact.

Maryland's trans and intersex communities face specific challenges when accessing basic bodily needs such as restrooms, healthcare, housing, and personal safety when moving about in public, and this bill lowers that barrier to access. Gender non-conformity has existed since the beginning of time. Due to the violence of colonial systems, trans persons are subjected to violence at higher rates; this rate is even higher for Black and Brown nonbinary and gender expansive trans persons. Black persons face an almost 3x higher risk of abuse in places of public accommodations than white persons according to the 2015 US Trans Survey (2015 US Transgender Survey).

Nonbinary, gender non-conforming, gender expansive, and intersex persons who do not have a binary gender presentation (female or male) are forced to choose a non-affirming (and potentially dangerous) restroom, or to incur health problems like urinary tract infections as a result of being precluded from using the restroom in public. Being perceived as entering the "wrong" restroom is dangerous, increasing the likelihood of violence, and reinforces the minority stress disproportionately incurred by Maryland's trans communities.

Creating an inclusive and safe environment is essential to strengthening Maryland's economy. Governor Larry Hogan stated in 2015, "Maryland is open for business." This bill is crucial to ensuring Maryland can compete for business with nearby states that have already codified law on this matter.

Equitizing access to bathrooms means those who need assistance from caretakers will not face scrutiny for going into the "wrong" restroom. Access to changing facilities for babies should be available to all persons, so persons of all genders and gender expressions caring for a child can change their baby. This can include trans men who are fathers and caretakers, gay men (transgender or cisgender) who are parents, and grandparents of any gender who care for a baby. No parent or caretaker should have to change a baby on the floor because changing tables are only available in women's restrooms.

The Church Without Walls asks that you support HB 0572. This moral and just piece of legislation will benefit many current and potential residents, in addition to those who travel to the state of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Janelle Bruce, Esq. Founder & Pastor of The Church Without Walls, Global Reach. Revjbruce@thecwow.org.